

I Read *Festival* in the Lair of Bacchus (Or, Not Criticism but a Response: Mia You's *Festival*.)

1.

It might be overdue
Time to make a fffffffool of myself.
having tried many other strategies
to make worthwhile the English Empire's tongue
One I can bite down on
and turn over to make space in my mouth for three other languages
that are better for me so long as they remain spoken badly.
Y por eso estoy orgullosa ser analfabeta
porque la tontería debe ser la única manera andar que vale la pena.

Have a party!
Play around!
Enjoy myself.
Let them see me
earn these beads,
at daddy Dionysus' best idea,
the paraaaaaaaaaaaaade.

I'll soon be back at the beginning,
a fool working his way through mimesis
and winning a prize for the best writing in the style of a
great (again) American author.

When born-in gave way to
where raised-in then gave way to
now living-in what results:
three different places, which fail to fulfill the role of home.
The twice dislocated poet wrestles with poetic form
picking up lexical tools, perhaps in an attempt

at strangling the windpipe of poetry's origin
as in crawling back up the birth canal of verse,
"I'm making my language into yours".¹

I am reading *Festival*,
farther from New Orleans than a fistful of beads can be thrown
but close enough to be *basically the same thing*
to a Dutch person who does not even know
that their 9x great-grandfather financed the Louisiana Purchase
because Thomas Jefferson's bitchass did not even have the money
— although he did have six legally black illegal children,
and that! is "lax lineage"² —
to relieve France of their *mécontentement*,
having been forced to acquiesce to Haitian sovereignty.

Something, something the draaaaaama of the Empire.
My own words as yet lack particular form in chorus
while I decide among several routes:
mimicry, dedication, extrapolation, critique.
Regarding the last of these
I don't know how else we come up for air
from under the waters of Empire
if not by unburdening ourselves with critical proximity.

On origins, on Europe, on aesthetic forms
Mia You writes:
"We learn that they determined
to translate their blood-lust into
festivals and rituals, which in turn
became art, culture, civilization,
and instead of taking on the role
of their murdered father they
came up with totems usually in
the form of animals or abstractions,

1. Mia You, *Festival*, Belladonna* Collaborative: Brooklyn, New York, 2025. All subsequent quotations originate from *Festival*.
2. 9.

which worked out pretty well
for them, it must be said”³

and I would add,
You is determined not to clean up the
mess that is left the next morning.

2.

Form is carried by meaning in poetry.
No, meaning is carried by meaning
and form obfuscates that meaning
only giving it away
to those willing to unencrypt, or it reaches
those who are supposed to hear it
like a spiritual message.
And sometimes, as plain as newsprint
printed with meaning, intention is obscured through
the cracks between connotation and denotation.

You strings the space in “Trench Lyric”
between an ad hoc binary that places
white women over the age of forty-five
at the opposite end of the spectrum to black women postpartum.
The space in between is where everyone else lives
trying to make sense of what is happening
to the statistics that describe their *mécontentement*.

A worthwhile way to celebrate a birthday:
in the chamber room logging what statistics
have noticed about how white women
are not doing well in the system
that was supposedly designed to protect their category.

GASP

3. 15-16.

3.

(TY MJR) My birthday is also:
World Elder Abuse Day National Turkey Lovers Day
Nature Photography Day Father’s Day
Sometimes Beer Day Britain
Magna Carta Day
Global Wind Day Justice for Janitors Day
Day of Prayer for Law Enforcement Officers Fly a Kite Day Trinity Sunday and
today, I am Thirty-Seven.

4.

“Look, I was marginalized, but I mastered the canon”⁴
writes You, satirizing her own indoctrination
into this practice of translating blood-lust into art.
I don’t possess the credentials to critique poetry
nor do I wish to (have credentials, do critique)
and especially not on a flat plastic surface that conceals my labor.
I’m outside in the swamp where my blood collects
with a notebook and a blunt pencil:
This is what has become of my flawless
and technical deadset canonical indoctrination into English grammar.

5.

Acknowledgement of receipt. You’s sonnet-as-citational device. I don’t know if
what follows is a sonnet but it describes tasks that feel far more pressing
than to review a book of sonnets, setting, lyric, found and prose poems,
though I admit I would like to do that rather than many other types of work:

1. Be grateful for my extremely cushy predicament.
2. Stop worrying. It doesn’t help get shit done.
3. Be here. Here being somewhere I don’t even know how to explain

4. 71.

without meandering through the biography that racialized people are expected to use as the primary base material for all of their art.

4. Draw the magnolias, draw the trumpet honeysuckles, draw the unripe figs, the peaches and persimmons. Draw butterflies, blackbirds, armadillos, draw the rumor of alligators recently attracted to this part of the river by the rising water levels. Draw the reeds.
5. Hidden enough by the overgrown reeds, lie naked on the small pier that used to tether a metal canoe used for fishing.
6. Look for fish and find tadpoles.
7. Get sun on my bare stomach, for my mitochondria, or something.
8. Remember exactly what it is about mitochondria that is so essential to “women” (appropriately qualify the definition of women) in relation to hormonal imbalances and mood “disorders” and patriarchal capitalism that is the root cause and obfuscation of the whole dysfunction. Be able to explain this relationship to reproductive laborer artists, writers, musicians and anyone whose job is supposedly distinctly elevated from regular work.
9. Visit family.
10. Come up with a good answer, that I believe in, to the repeat question of when I am coming back, to stay? And why do I still want to live in Europe?
11. Come up with a solution, that I believe in, for diverting flood water away from the house. For keeping ants out of the air conditioner. For not using the air conditioner. For drinkable water. For recycling.
12. Replace all food items and consumables in the house with things that aren’t as toxic, that are free of phosphates parabens preservatives sulfites. No unpronounceable ingredients allowed in this house, okay?! Or dyes.
13. Take beautiful photos (and twist my credible ankle falling into the trap of my own critical distance).

Then send urgent emails, confront desire aversion, do the ritual cleansing prescribed to me by the local healer, enjoy being in love while being here, terrified

and aroused by the hole.⁵ You deserve someone with a more developed sense of object permanence. Write a response, finding ease through responding not from formal technique but from here.

by Taylor Le Melle